

Corps Acquires Mitigation Lands along Missouri River

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has reported acquiring 30,700 acres of mitigation lands along the lower Missouri River and is establishing 28 mitigation sites for fish and wildlife habitat in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska. This information comes from a progress and cost report about the Missouri River Mitigation Project, which the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) transmitted to Congress today as required by the Water Resources Development Act of 1999.

Sites include the Tieville-Decatur Bends Project in Iowa that is scheduled to begin construction in March 2002; Tobacco Island in Nebraska, completed in December, 2001; Eagle Bluffs, Missouri, completed in January 2002; and a host of others. According to Dominic Izzo, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, the mitigation project demonstrates the Army's dedication to its environmental restoration mission as well as its desire to contribute to a net gain of wetlands nationwide.

Congress has authorized the Corps to acquire 166,750 acres for fish and wildlife mitigation purposes as annual funding is available. This would represent almost one-third of the original river habitat lost due to channelization of the lower Missouri River and is arguably the most ambitious riverine habitat restoration plan in the world. Congress authorized the Corps to acquire and develop 48,100 acres in 1986 and another 118,650 acres in 1999.

The Corps and others are developing these mitigation lands to replace the loss of fish and wildlife habitat because of past channel development efforts dating back to 1912 as well as the continuing navigation operations on the Missouri River.

The report explains that much more work remains to be done. The President's budget recommendations for Fiscal Year 2003 contain \$17.5 million for the Corps to develop aquatic habitat, and the overall cost of acquiring and developing the remaining fish and wildlife habitat authorized by Congress is estimated to be up to \$1.3 billion in current dollars.

Acquiring this land has enabled the Corps, working in collaboration with other federal and state agencies to restore wetland and other key riverine habitat. The Mitigation Project will restore or preserve shallow water, wetland prairie, bottomland forest and other native habitats in ways that will make an important contribution to restoring the natural ecosystem.

According to the report, acceleration in land acquisition will be essential if the agencies are to overcome the lag time between habitat development and the recovery of native fish and wildlife species. This is especially true for an

endangered species, the pallid sturgeon, which may benefit greatly from the new habitat. The continued execution of the existing mitigation project and implementation of the WRDA 1999 additional acreage will aid the Corps in complying with Endangered Species Act recovery objectives for the lower Missouri River.

This project has involved a multi-agency team from the Corps, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Missouri Department of Conservation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In addition, levee districts and private landowners have worked together to help make each site a success.

Congress directed preparation of the report, titled "Report to Congress, Missouri River Mitigation, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska, dated January 2002, in Section 334(b) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1999.

Additional information about the mitigation program is available at <http://www.nwk.usace.army.mil/projects/mitigation/index.htm>